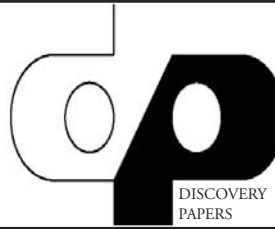




## COME TO JESUS



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John 5:16-47  
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Scott Grant  
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I'd like to start by quoting from one of my favorite theologians: Paul Taylor. Paul, observing that “life” was the theme that dominated the gospel of John, began our study of the gospel this way:

*I think if you ask the average person what they want, they'll have a bunch of different answers. But if you combined all those answers and put them together and started to find something similar about them, you'd see a pattern. This person wants a better job that pays more. That person wants a girlfriend. Another person wants their kids to obey them. Another wants their parents to give them more freedom. Someone else wants healing from sickness. Another person wants a new car.*

*All of those things have to do with life. What we want is life. We have different definitions of what might bring us life. Some want money, some want relationships, some want power, some want prestige. But all of us, at our core, want life. We are desperate and frantic and crazy about finding life.<sup>1</sup>*

Problem is, if you get the job, the girlfriend, the obedient children, the freedom, the healing, the new car, the money, the power, the prestige, you also get destination sickness. An anonymous blogger puts it this way: “Destination sickness is arriving at your destination, being where you have always wanted to be, having everything you always wanted to have, but not wanting anything that you've got.”

Quite simply, many people don't experience the life they're desperately and frantically and crazily looking for because they don't believe in Jesus, for John writes that “life” is in Jesus (John 1:3). However, many people who believe in Jesus also don't seem to experience the life they're looking for either. What's up with that?

The Jewish authorities in Judea didn't believe in Jesus and thus didn't experience life. Why not? Why didn't they believe in Jesus? Jesus himself answers the question in John 5:16-47. His answer helps us understand why many people today don't believe in Jesus. His answer also helps us understand why many people who believe in Jesus don't seem to experience the life they're looking for. Are you looking for life? Read on.

## Jesus' equality with God

John 5:16-18:

**<sup>16</sup>And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. <sup>17</sup>But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”**

**<sup>18</sup>This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.**

What “things” was Jesus doing? He healed an invalid and commanded him to walk. Hallelujah! No? Instead of rejoicing that a man has been healed, the Jews—that is, Jewish authorities in the region of Judea—persecute the one who healed him. They don't take issue with “these things” per se; they take issue with the timing of these things. Jesus did these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish day of rest. Jesus could have attempted to get off the hook by challenging his opponents' interpretation of the Sabbath. One could easily make the case that healing a man and commanding him to walk hardly constituted “work” in the sense intended by the Mosaic Law. Instead, Jesus grants that he is, in fact, working: “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” John, in fact, grants the Jesus was “breaking the Sabbath.”

After God finished creating the universe, he rested (Genesis 2:1-3), but since then, God, whom Jesus calls “my Father,” has been working. Why? Because humans wrecked themselves and creation, opening the door for Satan, sin, and death. Since then, the Father has been working to redeem humanity and creation and thereby restore them to the conditions they enjoyed when he rested from his work in the first place. In other words, the Father has been working to create a new and eternal creation and a new and eternal Sabbath. Jesus claims that he likewise is working for the sake of a new creation and a new Sabbath.

Jesus' opponents would have agreed that God is working, even on the Sabbath. When Jesus says that he also is working on the Sabbath, the way that his Father

is working, his opponents rightly understand that he is transcending the law and “making himself equal with God.” Jesus’ opponents, having persecuted him because of his actions on the Sabbath, now want to kill him. So much for getting off the hook.

The rest of the passage is a discourse: nothing but the words of Jesus. In John 5:19-47, Jesus explains the meaning and implications of his words in verse 17, which concern his equality with God: “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” As such, the discourse, first of all, concerns Jesus’ relationship with the Father, specifically his equality with the Father. Jesus references this Father-Son relationship no less than twenty times. Proceeding from Jesus’ equality with the Father, the discourse also concerns:

—What Jesus, as the Son, does because of his equality with the Father?

—The evidence for Jesus’ equality with the Father.

—How the opponents of Jesus—indeed, how all men and women—can benefit from Jesus’ equality with the Father.

## What Jesus does as God’s equal

John 5:19-30:

**<sup>19</sup>So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.<sup>20</sup>For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. <sup>21</sup>For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. <sup>22</sup>The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup>that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.**

**<sup>24</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.**

**<sup>25</sup>“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. <sup>26</sup>For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. <sup>27</sup>And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of**

**Man. <sup>28</sup>Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice <sup>29</sup>and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.**

**<sup>30</sup>“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.**

## The Son judges

Because of the unique relationship that Jesus, as the Son, enjoys with the Father, he does what he sees the Father doing, accomplishing the work the Father gave him to do. Chiefly, in this discourse, this work involves judging (John 5:22, 27-30) and raising the dead (John 5:21, 25-26, 28). The two tasks—judging and raising the dead—are related. The Son cannot raise the dead, in fact, unless he judges.

Remember, creation has been invaded by evil: by Satan, sin, and death. To bring about a new creation, the Son must first do what so many in our world can’t do or won’t do: he must identify evil and call it out; he must name it and condemn it. Therefore, the Son judges the world—that is, everything that is evil in the world—so that the world might be saved through him. First comes judgment; then comes salvation. Those who come to Jesus must not simply believe; they must repent and believe: they must turn away from evil and turn toward Jesus (Mark 1:14, Acts 20:21). Because of the first humans, evil corrupted God’s first creation. Because of the Son, evil will have no place in God’s new creation.

First, because of the Son’s unique relationship with the Father, he judges evil. Second, the Son raises the dead.

## The Son raises the dead

The Son speaks, and the dead are raised. When would that be? The hour is coming, but it is also now here. In what sense is the hour now here? First, even now, those who believe in Jesus have tasted of the age to come: in a spiritual sense, they already have life; they have already “passed from death to life.” Second, Jesus will call out to a dead man, Lazarus, who will rise from the dead (John 11:43-44). However, Lazarus, after being raised, will die again. The raising of Lazarus foreshadows the age to come, when there will be no more death.

The hour is now here, but the hour is also coming when all the dead, not just Lazarus, will hear the voice of the Son

and will emerge from their tombs—or will have their ashes and dust reassembled. Believers and unbelievers, the good and the evil: Jesus will raise all of us from the dead. Some, “those who have done good,” will enjoy a “resurrection of life,” but others, “those who have done evil,” will face a “resurrection of judgment.”

Jesus, of course, is not simply dividing people between those who have done good deeds and those who have done evil deeds, for sometimes, good people do evil and evil people do good. Jesus says elsewhere in John that the good deeds that count are those that have been “carried out in God” and that “the work of God” is to believe in the Son (John 3:21, 6:29). In this case, those who have done good are those who have believed in Jesus and followed him. Elsewhere, Jesus defines “those who have done evil” not simply as those who do evil deeds but as those who do not “come to the light,” who is Jesus (John 3:20).

Consider the power of the voice of the Son of God. One day, when he speaks, everyone who has ever lived in all of human history will rise from the dead to face their destiny.

Only God’s equal is qualified to judge in this way. Only God’s equal is able to raise the dead in this way. Why didn’t the Jewish authorities believe that Jesus was God’s equal and that he would judge the world and raise the dead? They had every reason to believe, based on the evidence that Jesus puts forth.

## Evidence for Jesus’ equality with God

John 5:31-47:

**<sup>31</sup>If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. <sup>32</sup>There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.**

**<sup>33</sup>You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. <sup>34</sup>Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. <sup>35</sup>He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.**

**<sup>36</sup>But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.**

**<sup>37</sup>And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, <sup>38</sup>and**

**you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent.**

**<sup>39</sup>You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, <sup>40</sup>yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. <sup>41</sup>I do not receive glory from people. <sup>42</sup>But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. <sup>43</sup>I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. <sup>44</sup>How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? <sup>45</sup>Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. <sup>46</sup>For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. <sup>47</sup>But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”**

Jesus grants that if he alone were speaking about himself, his testimony would not be valid. However, multiple witnesses support Jesus’ claim to be equal with the Father. Jesus summons four witnesses:

—The Father himself, who sent Jesus and is working through him.

—John the Baptist, who testified that Jesus was the Son of God (John 1:34).

—The works of Jesus, including his miracles.

—The Hebrew Scriptures, which bear witness about Jesus.

## Why they didn’t recognize Jesus

The Jewish leaders who oppose Jesus, however, disregard the witnesses. Consider what they have done with the Scriptures, which bear witness about Jesus.

True, the Jewish leaders search the Scriptures, but they do so incorrectly. Based on their study of the Scriptures, they expected the Messiah, but when he came, they didn’t recognize him. Why is that? Jesus would have us believe that they didn’t recognize him because they didn’t see God for who he really was. The Father and the Son are so aligned so that when you see one, you see the other—if you are seeing the one correctly, that is. For example, when Moses was writing about God in the Pentateuch, he was writing about Jesus (verse 46). If you read the Hebrew Scriptures correctly and therefore see God correctly, you will recognize him in Jesus; you will recognize Jesus as the climax of the Jewish story. Clearly, Jesus’ opponents didn’t

see God correctly. They searched the Scriptures, but they searched with blinders on.

Therefore, they saw God, more or less, as a projection of themselves. They expected him to conform to their agendas. This Jesus did not do. They assumed that God wanted what they wanted. Then Jesus showed up. When he repudiated their agendas, they were “seeking all the more to kill him.”

Jesus, as much as anything else, showed them their need: their need to search the Scriptures with a different purpose, their need to abandon their agendas, their need for God. The Scriptures, if searched correctly, show us how much we need God—especially how much we need God to deal with our sins. And that’s what the Son of God came to do. He is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

The Jewish authorities, however, were looking to one another to meet their need, not to God: “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” Instead of recognizing their deep need for God to deal with their sins, they took matters into their own hands and looked to one another for validation. Not seeing their need for God, they couldn’t recognize the Son of God when he came.

They didn’t believe that Jesus was equal with God. They didn’t believe that he will judge the world and raise the dead. They disregarded the evidence: the witness of the Father, the witness of John the Baptist, the witness of Jesus’ works, and the witness of the Scriptures. They refused to come to Jesus.

## Seeking validation from one another

Some of us, like the Jewish authorities, see God more or less as a projection of ourselves. We expect him to conform to our agendas. We assume that he wants what we want. Then Jesus shows up—or he doesn’t show up how and when we want him to. The Hebrew Scriptures show us our need, and in case we search the Scriptures incorrectly, or don’t search them at all, Jesus, in the gospels, shows us our need: our need for God to deal with our sins, our need for the lamb of God.

Most of us are aware of need—at the very least our need for food, clothing, and shelter. Most of us are also aware of deeper needs. However, instead of recognizing our deep need for God to deal with our sins, many of us, like the Jewish authorities, take matters into our own hands. Most of us have this feeling that we’re not all we’re supposed to be, that we’re not even what we want to be, but instead

of looking to God, many of us look to one another for validation. Why don’t people believe in Jesus? One reason: they’re looking to one another for validation, not to God. Why do many people who believe in Jesus not find the life they’re looking for? Same reason. We’re aware of weakness, but we compensate for it by trying harder, performing better, and varnishing our image. How do we know we’re doing better? By looking to other people.

How well are they doing? Everyone is doing well on Facebook. In fact, researchers at the University of Michigan, in a study released in August, found that the more college-aged adults used Facebook, the worse they felt. Study co-author John Jonides said, “When you’re on a site like Facebook, you get lots of posts about what people are doing. That sets up social comparison—you maybe feel your life is not as full and rich as those people you see on Facebook.”

How are other people evaluating us, especially in light of how well other people are doing? How we are perceived—by family members, peers, even strangers—becomes the measure of all things. When you need other people to validate you, you don’t need God. Oh, you need God; you just don’t know you need him.

If you’re looking to other people to validate you, how’s it working for you?

Humans are flawed, of course, and if you look to other humans for validation, your sense of yourself will be flawed. Jesus, on the other hand, did not receive “glory from people.” Earlier in the gospel of John, Jesus “did not entrust himself” to those who began to believe in him “because he knew all people” and he “knew what was in man” (John 2:23-25). Jesus refused to be imprisoned by other people’s assessment of him and was therefore free to be who he was and to do what the Father called him to do. If you look to others for validation, you will be imprisoned by their assessment of you—or by the way you perceive their assessment of you.

If you live for other people’s validation of you and they actually give it to you, for how long to you actually feel good about yourself? Isn’t it only a temporary fix? You need another hit, don’t you?

Cynthia Heimel, writing for the Village Voice, remembered the people she knew in New York City who worked at low-paying jobs before they became movie stars. After they became famous, each of them in actuality became more manic, unhappy, and unstable. Heimel writes: “That giant thing that they were striving for, that fame thing that was going to make everything okay, that

was going to make their lives bearable, that was going to fill them with ha-ha-happiness had happened, and the next day they woke up and they were still them. The disillusionment turned them howling and insufferable.”

If you live for the validation of other people and they don't validate you, you feel insecure. If you live for the validation of other people and they do validate you, you become insufferable.

How, then, can the opponents of Jesus—indeed, how can all of us—benefit from Jesus' equality with the Father? What were the Jewish authorities looking for when they searched the Scriptures and when they looked to one another? What are we looking for when we look to one another for validation? What are we looking for—desperately and frantically and crazily?

## Benefit from Jesus' equality with God

In point of fact, Jesus, by professing his equality with the Father and by repudiating the agenda of his opponents, wants to give them what they're looking for. What's that? It's "life," also defined as "eternal life." He wants them to "live":

— "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them **life**, so also the Son gives **life** to whom he will." (John 5:21)

— "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal **life**. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to **life**." (John 5:24)

— "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will **live**." (John 5:25)

— "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of **life** . . ." (John 5:28-29)

— "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal **life**; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have **life**." (John 5:39-40)

What is "life?" Remember, the Father and the Son are working in perfect harmony to create a new and eternal creation and a new and eternal Sabbath. The words translated "eternal life" would be literally translated "life of age": life of the final and eternal age. In one sense, then,

the gift of "life" will be given when the Father and Son complete their work to create a new and eternal creation and a new and eternal Sabbath. In another sense, however, the gift of life is given in the present to those who believe in Jesus, in anticipation of the consummation of the new age. The new age has broken into the present age so that those who believe in Jesus experience something of eternal life in the present. Jesus wants to give his opponents the life they've been vainly seeking by looking to one another for validation.

## Come to Jesus

What characterizes eternal life, which we can experience even now? Jesus characterizes it this way: "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Eternal life, both in this world and in the next world, is characterized by knowing God and knowing Jesus, who is equal with God. How do you know God? How do you know Jesus Christ? You know God best—indeed, you can only know him—when you know your need, when you know your need for the lamb of God who takes away your sins. If we search the Scriptures with blinders off, we will see our need for Christ, and we will see Christ. We will see how Christ meets our need. Knowing your need, confessing your sins, and coming to Christ, you can enjoy God and even revel in him. We search the Scriptures not first of all for life; we search the Scriptures first of all for Christ, who gives life.

Our primary mission is to know God. Everything else, including our vocation, is derivative. Everything else proceeds from knowing God and assumes its proper place when we make knowing God our primary mission.

How much better is eternal life—knowing God and knowing Jesus—than enjoying (or trying to enjoy) and reveling in (or trying to revel in) other people's assessment of you? Do you want life? Do you want validation? God created you and Jesus redeemed you, dying for your sins. Can validation come from any other place? Can life come from any other source? No one else has the right to validate you authoritatively.

Still, knowing all of this, it's not as if we can simply wish away—or even pray away—our tendency to look to one another for validation. However, once you become aware of your tendency to seek validation from people instead of from God, you know your need. What, then, do you do when you know your need? You do what the Jewish authorities refused to do: you come to Jesus. You confess your sinful tendency to seek validation from other people, and you come to Jesus. You come to Jesus so that "you may have life." Coming to Jesus, you revel in God's creation

of you, in his redemption of you—yes, in his validation of you, for those who come to Jesus seek and receive “the glory that comes from the only God.” You enjoy God; you revel in him. You come to Jesus and you experience life—the life you sought from looking to others.

How do you come to Jesus? You come to him in prayer. You can also pray by imagining that you are walking toward Jesus. You can also pray by literally getting up and walking while imagining that you are walking toward Jesus.

C.S. Lewis, in his essay “The Weight of Glory,” puts it this way:

*In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised . . . It is written that we shall “stand before” him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.*

If eternal life starts now, then we who believe in Christ are even now, because of the work of Christ, a “real ingredient in the divine happiness.”

## Memorable words

Years ago, when I was training to be a pastor, I asked a mentor how he dealt with praise and criticism. I learned a lot from him, but his answer to that question has stayed with me more than any of his other words. In fact, I remember his response word for word. I even remember his expression. He answered, almost dismissively, “Ah, I just give all that stuff to Jesus.”

I’ve enjoyed some of my sweetest moments with the Lord when I’ve confessed my tendency to seek validation from other people and found him, simply, to be right there with me. I’ve wished and prayed for him to change me, and I think he has—a little. Mostly, though, I’ve found

confession and coming to Jesus to be a way, simply, to enjoy God. Now that I think of it, I think enjoying God has something to do with how he’s changed me.

Are you looking for life? Confess sin, come to Jesus, and enjoy God. Come to Jesus—and live!

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Paul Taylor, “The Other” (Palo Alto: Discovery Papers, August 18, 2013), Catalogue 20130818.

<sup>2</sup>Elise Hu, “Facebook Makes us Sadder and Less Satisfied” (National Public Radio, “All Tech Considered,” Aug. 20, 2013).

<sup>3</sup>Cynthia Heimel, “Tongue in Chic” (*The Village Voice*, January 2, 1990), 38–40.

<sup>4</sup>C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Touchstone, 1980), 34.